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ABSTRACT

The role of research and information in legislative decisionmaking is discussed. It is suggested that planning is of marginal utility to state legislatures. The primary obstacles to planning in the legislative arena are the turnover among state legislators, internal shifts of power, and the legislative tendency to deal with discrete policy issues to minimize political conflict. It is proposed that policy analysis is potentially the most valuable type of contribution the research community can make to legislative decisionmaking. The utility of raw data in the legislative process is questioned, and the need for comparable data from different institutions is cited. The areas of research that hold promise are needs assessment and outcomes assessment. Implications for institutional research in support of the state-level legislative process are addressed. (SW)

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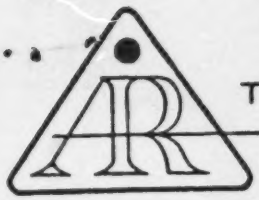

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RESEARCH, INFORMATION,

AND THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

THIS PAPER WAS PREPARED FOR PRESENTATION AT A PANEL ON STATE PLANNING AT THE 1979 FORUM OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH. THE AUTHORS FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION IN LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING. AFTER EXAMINING THE USES OF PLANNING, POLICY ANALYSIS, AND RAW DATA BY STATE LEGISLATURES, THE AUTHORS CONCLUDE THAT POLICY ANALYSIS IS THE MOST VALUABLE FORM OF RESEARCH SUPPORT FOR LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING. THE CONCLUDING SECTION OF THE PAPER FOCUSES ON IMPLICATIONS FOR THE STATE LEVEL ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH.

STATE COORDINATING AGENCIES, BY TRADITION, OPERATE ON THE BORDER BETWEEN THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY AND THE STATE POLICY MAKING ARENA. I HOPE THAT OUR INSTITUTIONAL COLLEAGUES IN THE AUDIENCE WILL BE KIND ENOUGH NOT TO INFER FROM THIS THAT WE VIEW OURSELVES AS A "BORDER-LINE" OPERATION.

WHEN WE ACCEPTED THE INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PANEL, OUR INITIAL THOUGHT WAS TO RESPOND FROM THE RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE. HOWEVER, AFTER CONFERRING WITH SOME OF OUR ASSOCIATES IN THE STATE LEGISLATURE, WE DECIDED THAT WE MIGHT MAKE MORE OF A CONTRIBUTION TO THIS PANEL BY ADOPTING THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STATE POLICY MAKER. OUR CENTRAL PREMISE IS THAT SINCE WE ARE ALL IN THE BUSINESS OF SERVING THE RESEARCH AND INFORMATION NEEDS OF STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL POLICY MAKERS, ONE OF OUR FIRST OBJECTIVES SHOULD BE TO UNDERSTAND THE NATURE OF THOSE NEEDS.

IN THE BEST TRADITIONS OF AIR PANELS, OUR MODERATOR HAS GIVEN US CONSIDERABLE LEEWAY IN SELECTING A TOPIC WITHIN THE BROAD FRAMEWORK OF "STATE PLANNING." THE SELDOM READ PARAGRAPH UNDER THE PANEL TITLE IN THE PROGRAM ALSO SAYS SOMETHING ABOUT THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF <u>STATE LEGISLATORS</u>. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE MANY OTHER ACTORS IN THE STATE POLICY MAKING ARENA, WE WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS ON THE ROLE OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

<u>THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS</u>

IN THE SHORT TIME AVAILABLE, I WOULD LIKE TO FOCUS BRIEFLY ON THREE ISSUES: FIRST, THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF

THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS; SECOND, THE UTILITY OF PLANNING, ANALYSIS, AND RAW DATA IN LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING; AND, THIRD, THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR OBSERVATIONS FOR THE STATE-LEVEL ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH.

BEFORE WE EXAMINE THE POLITICAL ARENA IN WHICH LEGISLATURES OPERATE, I SHOULD MENTION THAT WE OWE A SPECIAL DEBT TO JIM BRICKER, DIRECTOR OF THE WASHINGTON STATE SENATE RESEARCH OFFICE, FOR HIS INSIGHTS ON THIS SUBJECT. JIM HAS A CHAPTER IN BOB COPE'S FORTHCOMING BOOK ON INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH WHICH IS A "MUST" FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN THE ELUSIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH AND THE POLITICAL PROCESS (BRICKER, IN PRESS).

THE LEGISLATIVE POLICY MAKING PROCESS HAS AT LEAST FIVE IMPORTANT CHARACTERISTICS OF INTEREST TO THIS PANEL. FIRST, LEGISLATIVE DELIBERATIONS ARE DOMINATED BY THE INTERPLAY OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS AND ATTEMPTS TO EXERCISE POLITICAL INFLUENCE, NOT BY RESEARCH AND INFORMATION. SECOND, THE AVERAGE LEGISLATOR HAS TO DEAL WITH A MYRIAD OF ISSUES EVERY SINGLE DAY. AS A RESULT, THEY OPERATE UNDER SEVERE TIME CONSTRAINTS. THIRD, POWER IS DIFFUSED, OR FRAGMENTED, NOT CENTRALIZED, AND THE INFORMAL PROCESS OF EXERCISING INFLUENCE IS USUALLY MORE IMPORTANT THAN FORMAL PROCESS AND STRUCTURE. FOURTH, LEGISLATURES TEND TO DEAL WITH DISCRETE POLICY ISSUES BECAUSE THE BROADER THE SCOPE OF THE ISSUE AND THE MORE INTEREST GROUPS AFFECTED, THE MORE DIFFICULT IT IS TO GAIN CONSENSUS. HENCE THE LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING

PROCESS IS ALMOST INHERENTLY INCREMENTAL. FINALLY, THERE IS REGULAR TURNOVER BOTH THROUGH THE ELECTORAL PROCESS AND THROUGH FORMAL AND INFORMAL SHIFTS OF POWER WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE STRUCTURE. THEREFORE, ONE CAN SELDOM COUNT ON A LEGISLATURE TO COMMIT ITSELF TO ANY GIVEN POLICY BEYOND THE NEXT ELECTION.

WITHOUT A DOUBT, THIS IS AN EXTREMELY FRUSTRATING ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH TO OPERATE IF ONE BELIEVES THAT WE CAN DEVELOP "SOUND POLICY" THROUGH THE "RATIONAL" PROCESS OF PRODUCING GOOD INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS. NEVERTHELESS, LEGISLATORS APPEAR TO BE INTERESTED IN BETTER INFORMATION. WITNESS THE GROWTH OF LEGISLATIVE STAFFS OVER THE PAST DECADE. EVEN IF WE ASSUME THAT RESEARCH AND INFORMATION, IN GENERAL, PLAY A LIMITED ROLE IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS, WE BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE SOME TYPES OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION THAT ARE MORE USEFUL THAN OTHERS.

PLANNING, ANALYSIS, AND RAW DATA

AT THE RISK OF OVERSIMPLIFICATION, WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT THERE ARE AT LEAST THREE BASIC TYPES OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION THAT THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY CAN PRODUCE TO SUPPORT LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING: PLANNING, POLICY ANALYSIS, AND RAW DATA. I WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK BRIEFLY TO THE POTENTIAL USES OF EACH OF THESE TYPES OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS.

WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT PLANNING, AS WE KNOW IT TODAY, IS OF MARGINAL UTILITY TO STATE LEGISLATURES. DRAWING UPON OUR EARLIER OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS, THE

PRIMARY OBSTACLES TO PLANNING IN THE LEGISLATIVE ARENA ARE THE TURNOVER AMONG STATE LEGISLATORS, INTERNAL SHIFTS OF POWER, AND THE LEGISLATIVE TENDENCY TO DEAL WITH DISCRETE POLICY ISSUES IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE POLITICAL CONFLICT. THIS IS NOT TO SAY THAT STATE-LEVEL PLANNING IS IRRELEVANT -- BUT ONLY THAT LEGISLATURES ARE NOT INCLINED, BY NATURE, TO PARTICIPATE IN OR RESPOND TO PLANNING.

IT HAS BEEN MY EXPERIENCE THAT MUCH OF WHAT WE DO IN THE NAME OF PLANNING, AT BOTH THE STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS, IS REALLY POLICY ANAYLSIS --THE IN-DEPTH STUDY OF INDIVIDUAL POLICY ISSUES. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS TYPE OF RESEARCH IS VALUABLE TO STATE LEGISLATURES. IN FACT, OUR MAJOR POINT TODAY IS THAT POLICY ANALYSIS IS POTENTIALLY THE MOST VALUABLE TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY CAN MAKE TO LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING.

TO CLARIFY WHAT WE MEAN BY "POLICY ANALYSIS," BOTH AT THE STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS, I WOULD LIKE TO CALL YOUR ATTENTION FOR A MOMENT TO CAMERON FINCHER'S INTRODUCTION TO THE RECENT AIR FORUM ISSUE OF RESEARCH IN HIGHER EDUCATION. CAMERON SUGGESTS THAT THE FIELD OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH IS CONTINUALLY PLAGUED BY AN OBSESSION WITH RAW DATA:

> MANY INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS CONTINUE TO BE CAPTURED BY THEIR DATA AND CANNOT ESCAPE. DATA MAY BE SYSTEMATICALLY COLLECTED, RIGOROUSLY ANALYZED, AND COPIOUSLY TABLED OR CHARTED. AT THAT POINT, UNFORTUNATELY, MANY INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS APPARENTLY FREEZE AND DO NOT OR CANNOT OFFER WHAT SHOULD BE ACCEPTABLE AND HELPFUL

> INTERPRETATIONS OR EXPLANATIONS OF THEIR FINDINGS (FINCHER, 1979, P.5).

ALTHOUGH CAMERON'S REMARKS ARE ORIENTED PRIMARILY TO THE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHER'S ROLE IN INSTITUTIONAL DECISION MAKING, WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE PROBLEM HE IDENTIFIES IS EVEN MORE CRITICAL AT THE STATE LEVEL. LEGISLATORS, IN PARTICULAR, RARELY HAVE THE TIME OR INCLINATION TO POUR OVER CHARTS AND TABLES. IT HAS BEEN OUR EXPERIENCE THAT WHAT LEGISLATORS NEED IN THE WAY OF INFORMATION IS SYNTHESIS, ANALYSIS, AND BOTTOM-LINE CONCLUSIONS. RESEARCH FINDINGS THAT ARE INCONCLUSIVE, MUDDIED BY CONFLICTING INFORMATION, AND RIDDLED WITH METHODOLOGICAL CAVEATS TEND ONLY TO CONVINCE THE LEGISLATOR THAT THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY HAS LITTLE TO OFFER IN PROVIDING SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX POLICY ISSUES.

TO ILLUSTRATE THE TYPE OF ANALYSIS WE CONSIDER MOST USEFUL TO LEGISLATORS, I WOULD LIKE TO CITE A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE STUDIES WE HAVE CONDUCTED IN SUPPORT OF LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING IN WASHINGTON. AMONG THE MAJOR STUDIES THAT HAVE RESULTED IN CONCRETE POLICY OUTCOMES ARE AN IN-DEPTH STUDY OF WASHINGTON'S NONTRADITIONAL EVERGREEN STATE COLLEGE; A STUDY OF RECIPROCAL RESOURCE-SHARING ARRANGEMENTS ACROSS STATE BORDERS; A PLAN TO LINK TUITION LEVELS WITH THE COST OF INSTRUCTION; A PLAN TO FUND HIGHER EDUCATION ON A FORMULA BASIS; AN ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC TRANSFER POLICIES; AND A PLAN TO PROVIDE STATE SUPPORT FOR OFF-CAMPUS INSTRUCTION.

WITHOUT GOING INTO EXCESSIVE DETAIL AT THIS POINT, WE WOULD SUGGEST THAT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EACH OF THESE STUDIES WAS RELATED TO SEVERAL IMPORTANT FACTORS. FIRST, IN EACH

CASE, THERE WAS SOME STATE-LEVEL IMPETUS, AND THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED AND COMPLETED AT A TIME WHEN THE LEGISLATURE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE ISSUES INVOLVED. SECOND, THERE WAS BROAD PARTICIPATION AND CONSULTATION IN THE DESIGN AND ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS. THIRD, WE THINK THAT THE COUNCIL IS VIEWED AT THE STATE LEVEL AS A REASONABLY "OBJECTIVE" SOURCE OF INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS (A FACTOR THAT MAY BE IN PART RELATED TO ITS WILLINGNESS TO "INTERPRET" DATA). AND FOURTH, EACH STUDY INCLUDED A SERIES OF CONCRETE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LEGISLATIVE OR INSTITUTIONAL ACTION.

I WANT TO EXAMINE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE OBSERVATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH, BUT FIRST LET ME COMPLETE OUR OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING. THE THIRD AND FINAL CATEGORY OF INFORMATION THAT RESEARCHERS CAN PROVIDE IS "RAW DATA." I HAVE ALREADY BETRAYED OUR BIAS CONCERNING THE UTILITY OF RAW DATA IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS, BUT, AS WITH MOST BIASES, THE ASSERTION THAT RAW DATA IS NOT VERY USEFUL IS AN OVERSIMPLIFICATION.

THERE ARE SOME "TRADITIONAL" TYPES OF BASE-LINE AND TREND DATA THAT ARE IMPORTANT IN THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS -- MOST NOTABLY COST AND WORKLOAD INDICATORS AS THEY APPLY TO THE BUDGETARY PROCESS. I'M GOING TO CONFINE MY COMMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT TO THE MAJOR PROBLEM WE CONFRONT IN EMPLOYING THESE DATA AT THE STATE LEVEL. FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE THE MAJOR PROBLEM IS THE DIFFICULTY WE HAVE IN OBTAINING COMPARABLE DATA FROM DIFFERENT INSTITUTIONS. UNDERSTANDABLY, INSTITUTIONS

CHAFE AT THE NOTION OF MODIFYING THEIR INTERNAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS TO ACCOMMODATE STATE-LEVEL NEEDS, BUT INTER-INSTITUTIONAL COORDINATION IS ESSENTIAL IF WE HOPE TO MAKE USE OF ANY TYPE OF DATA IN FORMULATING AND IMPLEMENTING STATE POLICY.

WHAT "NEW" TYPES OF DATA SHOULD WE BE PRODUCING IN SUPPORT OF STATE-LEVEL POLICY MAKING? AS ONE OF MY COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY TEACHERS WAS FOND OF SAYING, "THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN." BUT THERE ARE SOME AREAS OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH THAT HOLD SOME PROMISE IF WE CAN IMPROVE THE STATE OF THE ART.

TO SET THE STAGE FOR OUR SUGGESTIONS, I WOULD LIKE TO REVIEW FOR A MOMENT THE TYPES OF SIGNALS WE ARE RECEIVING FROM WASHINGTON'S GOVERNOR, THE LEGISLATURE, AND OUR OWN CITIZEN COUNCIL. THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OF WASHINGTON SHARES MANY OF THE SAME CONCERNS THAT WE SEE CROPPING UP ALL AROUND THE COUNTRY: THE IMPLICATIONS OF LEVELING OR DECLINING ENROLLMENTS, THE TAX REVOLT AND INCREASING CONSTRAINTS ON PUBLIC RESOURCES, AND THE TENDENCY TO QUESTION THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL VALUE OF UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION. MOST RECENTLY, IN WASHINGTON, THESE CONCERNS HAVE BEEN TRANSLATED INTO SOME VERY SPECIFIC MESSAGES: FROM THE GOVERNOR, THE QUESTION "HOW MUCH HIGHER EDUCATION IS ENOUGH:" FROM THE LEGISLATURE, THE DEMAND FOR GREATER ACCOUNTABILITY; AND FROM OUR OWN CITIZEN COUNCIL, INCREASING CONCERNS ABOUT THE MAINTENANCE OF QUALITY.

WE HAVE TENTATIVELY CONCLUDED THAT THE AREAS OF RESEARCH THAT HOLD MUCH PROMISE IN RESPONDING TO THESE CONCERNS ARE NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT. IT IS NOT OUR

INTENTION TO DISCUSS THESE AREAS OF STUDY IN DETAIL. IN FACT, WE ARE HOPING TO HEAR FROM OTHERS ON THESE SUBJECTS DURING THE COURSE OF THE FORUM. HOWEVER, A FEW COMMENTS ARE IN ORDER.

FIRST, WITH REGARD TO NEEDS ASSESSMENT, PAT CROSS HAS SUGGESTED THAT WE HAVE DONE ENOUGH DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES, ESPECIALLY OF ADULT NEEDS. BUT WE THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT PAT ALSO CONCLUDES THAT THESE STUDIES HAVE HAD RELATIVELY LITTLE IMPACT ON POLICY (CROSS, IN PRESS). THE PROBLEM IS THAT WE HAVE INVESTED ALL OF OUR RESOURCES IN IDENTIFYING ADULT NEEDS WITHOUT ADDRESSING HOW THOSE NEEDS CAN BE MET. I MIGHT ADD THAT THUS FAR WE HAVE FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON "UNMET" NEEDS. WE MUST ALSO TURN OUR ATTENTION, AT LEAST AT THE STATE LEVEL, TO THE ISSUE OF WHETHER WE ARE DIRECTING OUR LIMITED PUBLIC RESOURCES TO THE AREAS OF "GREATEST NEED" AMONG TRADITIONAL CLIENTELES.

WITH REGARD TO OUTCOMES ANALYSIS, WE SEE THE PROBLEM AS PRIMARILY METHODOLOGICAL IN NATURE. THERE IS A GROWING INTEREST AND CONCERN ABOUT THE DEFINITION, MEASUREMENT, AND MAINTENANCE OF "QUALITY." HOWEVER, WE STILL HAVE NOT ACHIEVED MUCH SUCCESS IN MEASURING THE OUTCOMES OF HIGHER EDUCATION, ESPECIALLY IN THE VALUE-ADDED SENSE. AND WE HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO IN ESTABLISHING APPROACHES TO RESOURCE ALLOCATION THAT WILL REWARD THE PURSUIT OF QUALITY. IN THIS REGARD, WE ARE HOPING TO HEAR FROM GRADY BOGUE ABOUT THE TENNESSEE "PERFORMANCE BUDGETING" PROJECT DURING THE COURSE OF THE FORUM.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

THUS FAR, WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO SHARE OUR PERSPECTIVES ON THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE LEGISLATIVE PROCESS AND ON

THE TYPES OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION THAT APPEAR TO BE MOST USEFUL IN SUPPORTING LEGISLATIVE DECISION MAKING. THE QUESTION THAT REMAINS IS WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE OBSERVATIONS FOR THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH?

FIRST, TO THE EXTENT THAT INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS BECOME INVOLVED IN SUPPORTING STATE-LEVEL INFORMATION NEEDS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT IN WHICH LEGISLATURES OPERATE. INCREASED INTERACTION WITH LEGISLATIVE STAFF WOULD BE A GOOD PLACE TO START. WE WOULD ALSO SUGGEST THAT THERE SHOULD BE MORE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS AND THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN KEY STATE AGENCIES, MOST NOTABLY STATE BUDGET OFFICES AND STATE BOARDS AND DEPARTMENTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION. THIS INTERACTION IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE INTERACTION BETWEEN RESEARCHERS AND DECISION MAKERS AT THE INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL. IN FACT, WE BELIEVE THAT PANELS SUCH AS THIS ONE SHOULD SERVE AS FORUMS FOR THIS TYPE OF INTERACTION.

SECOND, FROM OUR PERSPECTIVE, POLICY ANALYSIS, OR THE IN-DEPTH STUDY OF DISCRETE POLICY ISSUES, IS THE MOST USEFUL TYPE OF DECISION-ORIENTED RESEARCH . WE BELIEVE THAT THIS IS THE DIRECTION THAT INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH SHOULD BE MOVING AT BOTH THE STATE AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS. WE CONFESS THAT THE ISSUE OF INSTITUTIONAL-LEVEL PARTICIPATION IN STATE-LEVEL ANALYTICAL STUDIES IS COMPLEX, BUT THERE ARE PRECEDENTS, AND THERE IS VALUABLE FXPERTISE AMONG INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS THAT SHOULD BE TAPPED AT THE STATE LEVEL. THE ONLY CHARACTERISTIC OF THE STATE-LEVEL POLICY STUDIES THAT

WE MENTIONED EARLIER WHICH CANNOT EASILY BE ACHIEVED BY INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCHERS IS THE PERCEPTION OF "OBJECTIVITY." AND WE THINK THAT THIS PROBLEM CAN BE OVERCOME THROUGH COLLABORATIVE APPROACHES TO STATE-LEVEL STUDIES.

FINALLY, DESPITE OUR RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE VALUE OF RAW DATA IN THE LEGISLATIVE ARENA, WE AGREE THAT STATE BUDGET OFFICES AND LEGISLATURES WILL CONTINUE TO SOLICIT CERTAIN TYPES OF DATA, PROBABLY AT AN EVER-INCREASING LEVEL OF DETAIL. WE HAVE INDICATED THAT THE MAJOR AREA IN NEED OF IMPROVEMENT WITH RESPECT TO "TRADITIONAL" HIGHER EDUCATION DATA IS THE NEED FOR IMPROVED COMPARABILITY OF INSTITUTIONAL DATA. WE HAVE ALSO SUGGESTED THAT, IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONCERNS BEING EXPRESSED BY POLITICAL LEADERS IN OUR STATE, TWO OF THE POTENTIALLY MOST VALUABLE AREAS OF RESEARCH, WHICH WE HAVE YET TO PERFECT, ARE NEEDS AND OUTCOMES ASSESSMENTS. EVEN IF WE PERFECT OUR METHODOLOGIES IN THESE AREAS, HOWEVER, OUR FINDINGS WILL HAVE LITTLE IMPACT ON POLICY UNLESS THEY ARE ACCOMPANIED BY SOUND ANALYSIS. AND EVEN THEN, IN ORDER TO KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE, IT IS IMPORTANT TO REMEMBER THAT EVEN GOOD RESEARCH IS ONLY ONE OF MANY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE POLICY MAKING PROCESS.

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